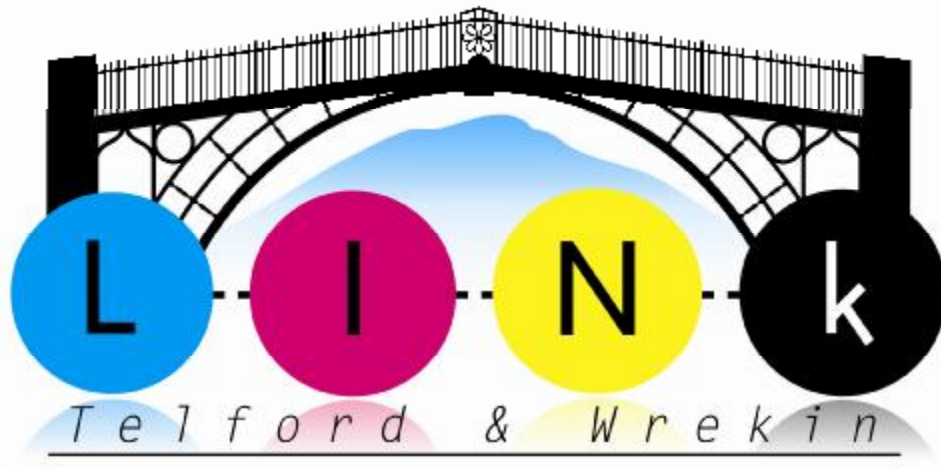


**Telford & Wrekin
Local Involvement Network**



Annual Report

1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009

Summary



About Telford & Wrekin LINK

Telford & Wrekin LINK is one of 152 local involvement networks ('LINKs') that were set up by Act of Parliament in 2007 to give everyone who uses (or has used, or may use) publicly-funded health and social care services in England a stronger 'voice' and powers to influence the kinds of services that are provided and the way that they are delivered.

Assisted by a small group of professional staff known as the 'hosting service' each LINK is run by volunteers: ordinary people with first-hand experience of health and social care services who have been elected by their local communities to ensure that the services that are provided meet the needs, wants and aspirations of local people.

LINKs have legal powers to look into any aspect of publicly-funded health and social care regardless of whether it is delivered by the National Health Service, the local authority, a 'not-for-profit' organisation (such as a voluntary organisation) or an 'independent' provider (such as a private business). In terms of health care the LINK can look at any service that is provided for any age group, but its powers are limited to services for adults when it comes to social care.

The full version of this annual report can be downloaded from the website or supplied as an attachment to an email. Both this summary version and the full version are also available in a range of alternative formats including Braille, large print and audio tape. Translation into a number of languages other than English can be arranged on request.

Published in June 2009 by Telford & Wrekin LINK, Suite 1, Conwy House,
St George's Court, St George's Road, Donnington, Telford TF2 7BF

Telephone: 01952 614180

Email: telfordandwrekinlink@staffs.ac.uk

www.telfordandwrekinlink.org.uk

Overview

The annual report begins by explaining that Telford & Wrekin LINK has been given statutory powers to ensure that health and social care services are planned, commissioned and delivered in the best interests of local people, and that its aim is to make a real and lasting difference to the way that publicly-funded health and social care is provided by:

- n asking local people what they think
- n looking into specific issues of concern to the community (for example, the range and quality of health and social care services, including gaps in provision, and other inequalities)
- n giving everyone who uses services — patients, carers, and their families and friends — the opportunity to suggest improvements to the services they receive
- n obtaining information about how services are planned, commissioned and delivered
- n visiting premises where publicly-funded health and social care services are delivered
- n referring matters that need investigating to a regulator such as the Quality Care Commission or the local Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The LINK's first year

The report describes the main focus of the LINK's work in 2008/09, which was to build a firm foundation for the future. Its key priorities were:

- n to form a working group (the LINK Working Group) to establish robust governance structures and processes, including a constitution and code of conduct
- n to hold elections for the CMG, and to nominate a chair and a vice-chair.

Initially 22 people responded to a call to set up the working group, including representatives from local organisations such as Age Concern, the Independent Complaints Advocacy Service, Impact Alcohol Advisory Service, South Staffordshire and Shropshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Telford Disability Forum, Telford Patient and Public Involvement Forum, and Wrekin Housing Trust. Four meetings took place between May and July 2008 at which a constitution for the LINK and a code of conduct for members were drafted. Following consultation with local primary care trusts (PCTs), acute and mental health trusts, Telford Borough Council and community and voluntary sector organisations, the final drafts of these documents were agreed on 1 September 2008, after which elections were held for a Central Management Group (CMG) of up to 16 elected or co-opted members (all volunteers). Like a board of governors, the CMG is responsible for determining policy and strategy but is accountable to the public.

The CMG was formed at an open public meeting on 25 September 2008 when 11 members were elected to stand until March 2010. Since then it has met on five occasions: on 8 October, 28 October (when an additional member was co-opted) and 9 December 2008, and on 11 February and 25 March 2009. The LINK constitution was formally adopted in December 2008 and its first annual general meeting took place on 18 May 2009 at Meeting Point House in Telford.

Workplan and achievements, 2008/09

The key aims of the CMG in its first year were:

- n to develop an understanding of the powers, role and purpose of the CMG as the governing body of the LINK
- n to agree operational procedures and policies (for example, on members' declarations of interest, Criminal Records Bureau disclosures, expenses, and visits to premises)
- n to create a database of organisations with an interest in health and social care
- n to raise awareness of the LINK and encourage people to get involved in its work
- n to set up a website and an online survey tool called Values Exchange (to be used to promote public debate about ethical issues)
- n to identify the key 'stakeholders' from a range of statutory bodies, community and voluntary sector organisations and independent providers, and to develop a working relationship with them.

Once the CMG was up and running it was invited to nominate representatives to sit on various committees of local health trusts and other bodies, such as the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Telford & Wrekin Council, which monitors the performance of the council's services. It also embarked on a programme of engagement, making contact with (or responding to expressions of interest from) a wide range of statutory and voluntary organisations, either by giving presentations or attending conferences, meetings and similar events. (A full list of the organisations on which the LINK is now formally represented together with a list of some of the organisations it engaged with 2008/09 is given in the report.)

The CMG also set up three sub-groups to deal with all matters relating to:

- n the LINK's 'enter and view' policy which governs visits to health and social care premises by its authorised representatives
- n the strategic healthcare review consultation process
- n palliative ('end-of-life') care. (A fourth sub-group has been set up to look at acute hospital services in 2009/10.)

Influencing the strategic healthcare review

On 16 January 2009 the LINK was asked to co-chair the Shropshire NHS Trusts and Shropshire County PCT Engagement and Communications Governance Group (ECCG), a group set up to influence the quality of the consultation process on the strategic healthcare review (*Developing health and healthcare: A strategy for Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin*) that will determine the shape of local health services for the next 12 years and will cover every aspect of health and social care, from maternity and children's health services, planned care and mental health services to health promotion, long-term conditions, acute care and end-of-life (palliative) care.

Improving palliative care in Telford

On 2 March 2009 the Palliative Care Sub-group initiated a series of meetings with Shropshire County PCT's End of Life Team on current practices for caring for people at the end of their life with a view to informing the LINK's strategy for improving palliative care in Telford.

The LINK's use of its statutory powers

Requests for information. The LINK made no formal requests for information from health and social care providers in 2008/09 because the information it required was already in the public domain or was willingly supplied whenever an informal verbal request was made by the CMG or the hosting service.

Visits to premises. In December 2008 the LINK formally adopted *Visiting service providers: policy, procedures and code of conduct for authorised representatives*, which sets out its statutory powers to enter and view premises where publicly-funded health and social care is delivered. However, it decided to pilot the policy before recruiting its first authorised representatives, so no formal visits were undertaken in the remaining months of 2008/09.

Annual health check (third-party commentaries). Because the LINK did not become fully operational until late December 2008 it was unable to make third-party commentaries to the Healthcare Commission's annual health check. The CMG wrote to the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospitals NHS Trust, Telford & Wrekin NHS Trust and the West Midlands Ambulance Service to explain this.

Financial statement, 2008/09

The costs of running Telford & Wrekin LINK in 2008/09 totalled £70.3k of which £60,402 was incurred on salaries, office accommodation and administration charges. As the budget allocated for the year was £119k the underspend of £49.5k will be rolled forward to 2009/10.

What the LINK will do in 2009/10

In addition to exercising its statutory powers and making improvements to the way it is run, the LINK's workplan for 2009/10 will focus on the following main areas:

- n **Key projects.** The LINK will continue to play an active role in the ECCG by focusing on the quality of the consultation process. It will also work to improve the provision of palliative care in Telford, and will look into the way that acute services (especially accident and emergency services) are commissioned.
- n **Engaging with the community.** The LINK will engage with the community to enable it to collate and analyse evidence of needs and concerns and gaps in provision, and to develop the LINK issues database. It will hold more community engagement events and develop stronger relationships with community groups and voluntary sector organisations.
- n **Engaging with policy makers, commissioners and providers.** The LINK's representatives will continue to play an active role on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the boards of NHS trusts and various other bodies.

Throughout the year the LINK will exercise its statutory powers by making a series of announced and unannounced visits to premises where publicly-funded health or social care is delivered, and by submitting formal requests for information from service commissioners and providers.

Getting involved in the LINK

Who can get involved?

The LINK is run by volunteers so anyone who uses local services, or may use them in the future, or is a carer of someone who uses them, can get involved. And if you have health or social care needs that aren't being met because there is no service that caters for you at present, or the service is not easy to use, you have all the more reason to take an active interest in the LINK. You don't need any special qualifications or prior experience — just a desire to help improve health and social care services locally.

If you would like to participate as an individual service user or as a representative of a local voluntary organisation or community group there are several LINK projects you could help to develop. The CMG does not want to duplicate activities that are already taking place, so if you are in a local network it makes sense to get involved in the LINK as it will give you greater power and influence.

What do LINK members and participants do?

Members of the CMG need to commit some time to attending meetings or representing the LINK on local panels and forums, but everyone else can choose to get involved as often — or as little — as they like. All skills and interests can be utilised: from organising events and displays to helping with administration and marketing. Or if you want to set up a project of your own or organise a survey we can help you do this — just let us know that you are interested. Expenses are reimbursed for approved activities.

How can I get involved?

You can get a membership form from the website or from the hosting service at the address below. If you are interested but don't want to be actively involved you can register your details and ask to be kept informed of activities and events in your area. You can also take part in LINK surveys by post, email or telephone.

When does the LINK meet?

All LINK meetings take place in public approximately every six weeks, usually at the LINK office in Donnington. There is also an annual general meeting. (A list of dates for the coming year is available from the hosting service or the website, as are the minutes of all previous meetings.) Anyone can attend, though space is limited. If you would like to come to a meeting you should always check with the hosting service first as the venue, time or date of the meeting may have to be altered at short notice.

How can I find out more?

You can find out more about Telford & Wrekin LINK in the following ways:

- n via the website: www.telfordandwrekinlink.org.uk
- n by email: telfordandwrekinlink@staffs.ac.uk
- n by telephone: **01952 614180**
- n by writing to: **Telford & Wrekin LINK, Suite 1, Conwy House, St George's Court, St George's Road, Donnington, Telford TF2 7BF**

